
**Economic Development,
Agriculture & Trade Committee**

HB 2166

Brief Description: Creating the joint legislative committee on water supply during drought.

Sponsors: Representatives Newhouse, Linville, Kristiansen, Hankins, Grant, Holmquist and Haler.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought.

Hearing Date: 3/1/05

Staff: Caroleen Dineen (786-7156).

Background:

The Department of Ecology (DOE) declares drought emergencies by administrative order in Washington. Before it can declare a drought emergency, the DOE must determine an area:

- is experiencing or expected to experience less than 75 percent of normal water supply; and
- is expected to suffer undue hardships (such as crop failures, municipal water shortages, and fish passage barriers) as a result of the dry conditions.

The Governor must provide written approval for Ecology to issue a drought order.

The DOE reports that recent warmer and drier-than-average weather patterns have reduced snow-pack levels across the state from less than 50 to approximately 20 percent of average. The National Weather Service's forecast indicates a continuation of above-normal temperatures and below-normal precipitation in the Pacific Northwest and concludes drought conditions should persist from Washington and Oregon into western Montana.

Summary of Bill:

The Joint Legislative Committee on Water Supply During Drought (Committee) is created. The Committee may request and review information relating to the state's water supply conditions. The Committee also may request and review information relating to the actual or anticipated economic, environmental, and other impacts of decreased water supply. The Committee may make recommendations to the Senate and the House of Representatives on budgetary and legislative actions to improve the state's drought response programs and planning.

The Governor's executive water emergency committee, the DOE, the water supply advisory committee, and other state agencies with water management or related duties must cooperate in responding to Committee requests. When a drought conditions order is in effect, the DOE must provide the Committee with at least monthly reports describing drought response activities of the DOE and other state and federal agencies participating on the water supply availability committee. The report must include information regarding applications for, and approvals and denials of, emergency water withdrawals and temporary changes or transfers of water rights.

The Committee includes eight legislative members, four from the House of Representatives and four from the Senate. The members are appointed biennially by the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate respectively. The Committee must include the chairs of the water resources committees of each legislative chamber and two members from each major political party for each chamber.

The Committee must elect a chair and vice-chair. The chair must be a member of the House or Representatives in even-numbered years and a member of the Senate in odd-numbered years. The Committee is convened at the call of the chair when a drought conditions order is in effect or when the chair determines, in consultation with the DOE, that a drought conditions order is likely to be issued within the next year.

Committee members serve until successors are appointed or until they are no longer members of the Legislature. Vacancies are filled by appointment from the same political party.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.